

A is for Anemia by lilies_in_a_vase

Series: [Lilies' Alphabet Soup of Pain \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

Max' brother has been standing stock still in the middle of the aisle for over two minutes now.

Joyce can see the top of his curly head over the rows of products, and thinks he must be somewhere between the bread and toothpaste. Just... standing there.

She glances over at the clock, and frowns as she looks back at him. Three minutes now. She has half a mind to go over and check on him. See what the hell he's doing.

A is for Anemia

Author's Note:

This is probably one of the shortest things I've ever written.

I hope you still enjoy it, though!

Disclaimer: I don't own "Stranger Things".

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Joyce has dealt with shoplifting teenagers before, but for all the ways that Billy's behaviour is strange, it does not feel like the type of behaviour a shoplifter would exhibit. For one, he's not being sneaky, not trying to hide. Unless he's hoping that by standing still he'll melt into the background and Joyce will think he's just a very realistic statue, that is, but she saw him walk in, so it's not like it would work.

She sighs, and crouches down to restock the lower shelves with pasta. When she straightens back up, Billy's moved. She looks towards the

end of the aisle he'd been in, and sees him coming up towards the register, a loaf of bread in hand.

Joyce leaves the pasta and goes up to let him pay for his stuff.

He doesn't say anything when he hands her the money, or when she bags his bread and the jar of jam, but he does watch her with this... uncertain look in his eyes. When they, Max and Billy, first came to Hawkins, they still had that golden tan clinging to their skins, even though it was the end of October, but that's gone now, Billy's skin pale.

"Ms. Byers?" he asks, voice hesitant, and Joyce looks up at him, raising both her eyebrows. "Could you... or Jonathan, could one of you pick up Max from the Arcade and drive her home when you go get...?" he trails off, screwing his eyebrows up.

"Will," Joyce provides with a small smile, handing him his bag.

"Yeah, Will. Could you?" He looks at her like he's expecting a no.

Joyce decides to try for humour, wishing to make him stop looking at her like that. "You got a hot date you don't want to miss?" she jokes, smiling.

Billy chuckles, eyes distant, nodding a little. "Yeah. Yeah, kind of-" He seems to stumble over his own feet, Joyce's hand shooting out to grab ahold of his arm and his own hand, holding tight to the counter,

being the only things keeping him from tumbling to the floor.

He breathes harshly, eyes squeezed shut and face downturned. They stay like that for a minute or so, Joyce staring at him with worry churning in her gut. She hadn't noticed it before, but now, still holding his arm, she can feel small tremors going through him.

"Billy?"

He breathes in quickly, shaking his head and wincing. "I'm okay," he says. "I take it you can drive Max home, then? I'll get out of your hair now, go-"

"Hey, hey, no," Joyce says, rounding the counter and coming up to see stand beside him. She doesn't miss the way he wavers when she has to let go of his arm to get around. She's small enough that it's easy for her to move so he ends up with an arm over her shoulder. "I'm not letting you drive like this. Come on. There's a couch in the back."

She leads him into the backroom, where they've got the employee bathroom, a sink and microwave, a table where Joyce sits and eats her lunch, Donald's office, always locked when he's not in, and an old, ratty, brown couch. Joyce thinks it must've been there since the 40's, at least.

She deposits Billy down on it, and reaches for the blanket splayed over the back, shaking it out and putting it around him.

“Rest. Jonathan can pick up Max,” she says, laying a hand on his head and ruffling his curls.

Billy’s hand reaches for her wrist before she can leave. He won’t look at her as he speaks. “Max is still in the Camaro. I wasn’t sure if...”

“I’ll go tell her.”

“Yeah. Thanks,” he mumbles, and lets go of her.

Joyce gently closes the door behind her. The shop seems to still be empty, so she leaves it, stepping out into the car park.

The Camaro is one of the only cars there, and in the passenger seat, Joyce can just make out a head of red hair.

She knocks on the glass, Max jumping a little in her seat before turning to look at her, her expression settling into something in between a smile and frown.

“Joyce?” She asks, opening the door.

“Hi, honey. I talked to Billy. You can go back to the Arcade, alright, and then Jonathan will drive you home when he picks up Will?”

“Okay...” Max says, closing the comic she’d been reading and reaching over to pull the key out of the ignition. “Is Billy...?” She shakes her head, hair flying in all directions as she gets out of the car, skateboard under one arm. “I don’t know, he’s been... weird. Is he...?”

“I’ll take care of him,” Joyce says, patting Max’ shoulder. “Don’t worry.”

“Okay. Just. Here,” she hands her the keys to the Camaro, and puts the skateboard down on the ground, skating away towards the Arcade.

Joyce goes back inside, back to her pasta and the familiar routine of work.

A few hours later, she goes over to the front door and turns the sign back around, signifying the store as closed. She sighs, hands on her hips. She doesn’t really know what to do about Billy. If she’s honest, she’s kind of surprised he hadn’t come out hours ago and demanded his keys back.

Joyce reaches a hand up and unties her hair from the ponytail she’d kept it in, dragging a hand through it as she goes into the backroom.

No wonder Billy hadn’t come out. He’s sleeping.

A small smile graces her lips, and she crouches down, shaking him gently awake. He blinks bleary eyes up at her.

“Feeling better?” Joyce asks.

Billy doesn't answer, instead he sits up with a small groan, wringing his hands around in his lap.

“Ms. Byers?” he eventually asks.

“Yes?” Joyce says.

It seems like whatever he needs to say is important, but he doesn't really want to say it. It's like pulling teeth. “Could you drive me to the hospital?”

Joyce feels all air leave her, only to be replaced by that mounting worry. Billy must sense it, because he starts speaking again, quickly this time.

“It's just- I don't think I should drive, and my dad and Susan are away this weekend, and I think I know what's wrong with me but I- I need... I need help.” Those last few words are said so quietly Joyce barely catches them.

But she does, and she nods, standing back up. “Of course,” she says, and waits for him to stand, just to make sure he can.

He still seems a little shaky, but not bad enough that he can't walk on his own. If Joyce still stays close by, thinking of Jonathan, then no one has to know.

She grabs Billy's little bag of groceries on the way out, and locks the door behind them. She sees Billy glance at the Camaro, but he doesn't protest when Joyce instead leads him to her own car. He doesn't speak at all, the whole way to the hospital.

Once they get there, Billy goes ahead, and when Joyce catches up to him, he's already at the counter, speaking to a nurse, voices too low for Joyce to hear. She sits down in one of the hard plastic chairs, and eventually, Billy joins her.

Still, he doesn't say anything, hands clenched into fists, but Joyce thinks that it must mean something still, that he asked her to drive him, that he sat down beside her. That he, she realises, was so scared he might've crashed the Camaro that he didn't want to drive with Max in it.

"William?" a nurse calls, and it's a reflex, to look up at the sound of her son's name. Billy looks up as well, and Joyce sees the nurse motion with her hand at him to follow her, and it hadn't really hit her until now that it must be his full name, too.

Billy stands up and leaves with the nurse. He's gone for perhaps half an hour, Joyce not having anything better to do than glance at the clock every few minutes.

Billy stops in front of her, and Joyce follows his gaze as he turns

around. There's a doctor watching them from the other side of the room, and Billy points at her with his thumb. Joyce lifts a hand up in a small, unsure wave. The man seems satisfied enough and turns around, leaving the waiting room.

"You can drive me back to Melvald's now," Billy says. "Or to Cherry, if you want."

He starts walking before Joyce has a chance to answer, and she has to hurry to catch up. It's not like Billy will get into the car without her, anyway.

"What was that about?" she asks as they take their seats, pulling on seatbelts.

She gives him a moment to answer, but he doesn't, and Joyce sighs. Once she gets to a red light, she turns to look at him.

He's leaning his head against the glass, watching the darkness of Hawkins outside. Movement drags her gaze to his lap, and she sees he's got a little bottle, like one you keep pills in, in his hand. He didn't have it before, so it must've been given to him at the hospital.

She tries to make her voice more gentle, kinder, as she speaks, "Billy?"

The light turns green, just as Billy begins talking. "I just... I didn't want to bother you, I just..." He sighs. "I'm anaemic. Like, my shitty

body doesn't get enough red blood cells on its own, so I don't get enough oxygen to, well, all that stuff that needs it, so I need to eat stuff that's got lots of iron, but I've been taking these," she hears the sound of him holding up the little bottle and shaking it, "for a few years now."

"Okay," Joyce says, to show she's listening. She can tell he's got more to say.

"Yeah, and... And my dad needs to go with me, to pick them up, or pick them up for me, because I'm a minor or some stupid bullshit like that. But we were running low on money, so he said I could deal without them, for once, and it was fine, at first, but then he forgot to pick them up the next time, and- And I've been skipping basketball practice, because I was scared I'd pass out, and then it just got-"

"Worse." Joyce grips tightly to the wheel, picturing it being Billy's dad's neck. *Forgot to pick up what is essentially his kids medication? The hell?*

"Yeah," Billy breathes out shakily. Then he starts up again, voice frantic and a little agitated. "Listen, I really appreciate you helping me out. It was real nice of you."

"What did that doctor want with me?"

Billy sounds sheepish. "I... might have told him I was staying with you. He didn't really want to let me go when I told him my dad and Susan weren't home. But it's fine! I can deal with it on my own, now, I just needed to get-"

“Oh no, you’re staying at my house tonight,” Joyce says, feeling a little outrageous that he’d really think she’d just abandon him on his own after this.

“But Max-“

“Can be picked up by Jonathan from your place, and have a sleepover with Will. I know he wanted help to plan the campaign for Lucas’ birthday.”

She’s expecting more protests, more arguments for why she really should just drop him off at home and be done with it, but none come. Instead, Billy just says “Okay,” very quietly, and when Joyce glances back at him, he’s leaning his head against the window again, eyes closed and arms hugging his chest. A small smile playing on his lips.

Joyce indulges in a smile of her own, and keeps driving.

Author's Note:

Right, so, I have no actual idea if this is how anaemia would be dealt with, especially not during the 80’s. (This series is mostly just the result of my already having written what I want for G, but not being able to come up with a title, so I decided to make a series with the same type of titles for all of them just to make it easy for myself.)